

Urban Forestry Commission

The Urban Forestry Commission was established to advise the Mayor and City Council concerning the establishment of policy and regulations governing the protection, management, and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle

March 9, 2011 Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 2750
700 5th Avenue, Seattle
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Attending

Commissioners

Matt Mega (MM) – chair
John Small (JS) – vice chair
Nancy Bird (NB)
Gordon Bradley (GB)
John Floberg (JF)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE

Public

Steve Zemke (SZ)
Michael Oxman (MO)
Margaret Thouless (MT)

Absent- Excused

John Hushagen (JH)

Call to order

MM called the meeting to order

Chair report

MM - Regarding the debrief to Council one thing he took away was that Conlin wants to focus on the value of trees as groves and groups not as individual trees. He pushed back a bit because when we create zones we are striving for equity. We are trying to save corridors. This is a challenge might need to prioritize areas for protection. Another thing is related to outreach for the new ordinance, he is concerned that we are stopping work on the ordinance. He doesn't want to pick it up in 2012 exactly where it is. How are our position papers inform a better ordinance now. He also raise the issue of having Town Hall meetings that the City can put on focusing on trees and tree issues not focusing on rules and regulations but on the quality of trees. Not that UFC or Sandra have the capacity to undertake this task.

JS – One thing the City did with the shoreline update is they had meetings with maps and receiving comment from the public.

GB – There is a whole range of benefits of trees. Different configurations produce different kinds of benefits. Some individual trees are important

NB – Consider the integrity of the tree (such as they do for buildings on historic preservation)

JR – Talk about opportunities during this break. Shift research to ecological and ecosystems research. Everything we do is based on the development paradigm. Look at actual natural systems functions. Maybe move towards exceptional grove protection vs. individual tree protection.

MM – Does this fit with the Green Factor?

JR – It's not necessarily related. New low rise code created more flexibility by creating larger landscape areas.

JF – People in the Cascade Land Conservancy are involved in eco-systems values

JR – monetizing the value of trees – not enough work has been done in this area. How do groves impact tree health?

JR – He and Peg met with SPU (Nancy Ahern and Miles Mayhew) and looked at a report on the percentage of water intercepted and stormwater benefits. He and Peg can brief the UFC later on and maybe invite Miles and Nancy for a Q&A session with the UFC

JF – how do we measure benefits of groves vs. individual trees? Maybe use an optimization algorithm for corridor movement, species movement, minimal viable size for ecosystem value? Need to define what we want to get out of it. To move in the direction that would be supportive of value

MM – does that fit into the ecosystems metrics for the tree protection position paper?

JS – no net loss of ecologic function is mentioned in the shoreline master plan. We'll talk about this when we move to the Shoreline Master Plan.

MM – JF is stepping back and looking at the function and JS is looking at it from the regulatory perspective.

JS – it's good to think about it in the context of what are you going to do with information once you have it. He works in critical areas, shorelines and there is the good intention to maintain ecological function but when you deal with the code it doesn't happen. It is measurable, actionable, equitable? Is it more of a goal or more of a role data point.

JF – More effective to focus on how business is done in the City and regulations.

JS – it might fit better in the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) update and not on the Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO).

JF – the Commission needs to address both

Review of 2011 UFC Work Plan timeline

MM – asked for clarification on why revisit the work plan

JS – Starting with public comment had the notion that this is an opportunity to stop reacting and frame the debate with Town Hall meetings and such. UFC can set agenda more proactively. Last year was very reactionary in nature.

SPdB – PS said that knowing how the City works. If Council is looking at resuming activity on the ordinance in 2012 it might be more like two years. It would be good to revise the work plan to tee up issues in a more proactive way

SPdB – Learned more about the process for the UFMP 2012 update. Met with Tom Hauger (DPD) who is in charge of the Comprehensive Plan update next year. The UFC sent a letter encouraging Council to adopt the plan or provide input for the 2012 update so they can get behind it. Due to the discrepancy between the canopy cover goal stated in the Comp Plan (40%) and the UFMP (30%) it would not be legal for Council to adopt a plan that is inconsistent with the Comp Plan. The Comp Plan calls for 40% with a 1% annual increase. If the UFMP is ever to be adopted by Council it would need to be consistent with the Comp Plan. It would be very helpful for the UDMP update to have the UFC support on advocating for consistency between the two documents. If you could include in the work plan work to provide DPD with a recommendation around what the UFC believes the correct canopy cover goal number is. The timeline for the Comp Plan update requires to provide DPD with proposed language on the goal (the specific percentage the UFC considers to be appropriate) by May 2011. It's possible to change the comp plan but we would need to work with Council on that.

JR – everything is on the table during the full Comp Plan update. What would be the best vehicle for advocacy besides the letter to Tom Hauger and Diane Sugimura?

SPdB – getting the full force of the UFC behind a recommendation would be very helpful. If she had to make a recommendation she would advocate for 30% based on what she's learned from the process the Urban Forest IDT undertook to arrive to that number. If the UFC considers a different number to be adequate it would be very helpful to know it.

NB – 30% doesn't have to be the end of it. We could make a much longer term goal. It doesn't seem like we can afford to lose any trees at all. Any steps we take back on the regulatory approach with be very important. Need to take the political hat off.

JR – UFMP will be updated in 2012. Comp Plan updates in 2013. Need to have the right wording in the Comp Plan draft so we can align the UFMP update. After Comp Plan is updated then UFMP can be adopted.

MM – We could use the Comp Plan and UFMP updates dovetail and start having conversations about trees with the public

SPdB – there was the question of whether we could remove the 30% goal from the UFMP and I said no. The UF IDT manages to that number. We need to have "a" number as a management tool.

JF – What came out for him at our last meeting is that the 30% did not have a scientific base but was appropriately aspirational given other cities. We have our work cut out for us. We can point to American Forests but that's not a scientific number.

JR – the 30% number is a thoughtful analysis of development patterns in Seattle. Still legitimate base.

JF – Range of canopy among 40-50 cities and say where Seattle is among them. It's not very strong.

JR – I don't think it's not strong. Look at land use patterns, lot size, foot print, plantable areas, ROW, etc. if we analyze it and come up with what's available. I think the 30% is strong.

NB – the 30% sounds like the City staff that looked into it think it's reasonable. If we look into that we can then say if we were to achieve 40% this is what we would have to do. Provide alternatives that are bigger than the tree ordinance. Maybe tackle different zones. There might not be the political will to take it on.

JF – this is academic. 30% is such a reach. Once we get to 30% we can then talk about 40%. We need a benchmark. A number we can start with.

PS – The benchmark is coming, so let's putting aside. We don't have a 'why' we only have a 'what'. We need to defend the why once we start enforcing the canopy cover. We have time and we can work on getting to the why. There is no enough research being done around this so we might not get to an accurate why.

JR – Isn't monetized value of ecosystems services the shy?

PS – from an enforcement standpoint we are talking that doesn't have anything else behind it

JF – more value with more trees but still have competing uses. How can we justify ourselves.

JR – would like to hear an ecosystems-based argument for the number

GB – speed limits, height limits, how defensible are those?

PS – those have safety data and basis to a degree

JS – might need more why. Could focus on year-by-year metrics and goals. Let's not worry about 2024 but 2014. What kind of trajectory can we expect. iTree data will be a good set of data. Imagery and Lidar is starting to be more readily available.

JF – the Comp Plan calling for 1% annual increase in canopy cover assumes we can measure our canopy annually and that the error is lower than the 1% called for.

MM – Even iTree won't give you a year-by-year level of detail. The data is changing. Land use determination from aerial photos. He is working in a project in Columbia City with four UW students using land use determination from aerial imagery

JR – have a goal to produce a meaningful statement for the Comp Plan within a month and a half, with a how much (%) with the scientific why to justify the goal. We, as a group need to be able to get behind a letter that includes a “what” and a “why.”

SPdB - Maybe a meeting with those players who produced the 30% number.

NB, JR, and JF will work on producing a recommendation for the Comp Plan. Sandra offered her support.

PS – is interested in the hydrology piece. Felt like lot of time was wasted throwing the baby out with the bath water. Time would be better spent going to community meetings. I don't believe the community quite gets the issue.

MM – no sense on continuing to write position papers if City is not working on it. Raise issues with a different method. Maybe conversations, Town Hall meetings, etc.

NB – We have some of that in the 5-year work plan. She will work with Matt on adjusting the work plan

PS – the message has not gone across from departments to the community on tree preservation and canopy cover.

NB – getting back on how we are submitting information to the City. When staff receives input, they already wrote their piece, right. With this piece what's the best way to support Sandra on this.

SPdB – DPD said if you would like me to include a change to the canopy cover goal I will need input from you. If it came from the UFC that would have weight.

NB – that clarifies that. Advocacy piece is important. How can we re-shift our work plan to address it.

MM – our second meeting of the month is supposed to be a working meeting. Small group meets first and brings it to the UFC to work on.

Shoreline Master Plan review

JS – recommends UFC comments on issues regarding the language used in the shoreline master plan (SMP) that would be consistent with a future tree protection ordinance. He then walked through his comments on the different issues he saw in the proposed amendments to the shoreline master plan. (detailed conversation recorded in digital recording of the session:

<http://www.seattle.gov/trees/meetingdocs.htm>

JS will produce a draft Memo for UFC adoption focusing on trees, critical root zone and lack of protection for non-native mature trees.

Letter to Urban Forest IDT – introduction and possible vote

MM – is there any comment on the letter? It's really an effort to reach out and connect with the IDT.

NB – Last paragraph could be more direct.

PS – something up front, thank you for your commitment we are looking to strengthen our partnership.

JR – instead of saying 'one thought is to...' we propose that we meet quarterly.

NB – what format would that be?

SPdB – meet to talk about the 2011 work plan.

PS – how many people are we talking about?

SPdB – probably 15 people. All departments are involved and if someone doesn't attend, then they can read the notes.

JR – he liked the annual brainstorming. Strategy, big picture session.

NB – good to see how work plans align

JR – then we can create

SPdB – ongoing coordination is my role

MM – propose an annual meeting

JR – what's appropriate regarding City process?

SPdB – In this case it might be a good idea to focus on the UFMP 2012. Maybe get together in the fall?
An extended meeting...

MM – thinking about a half day.

NB – the thing about the retreat is that there was not dialogue because the commission was new.

MM – we can now have an interaction

JR – part of our purpose for that is to allow the exchange in work plans to support each other

JS – sharing work plans in one meeting and the other on the UFMP update

NB – better to go in informed

JS – things we need to do in preparation on our work plan

MM – share work plans in writing

SPdB – Everything is geared towards accomplishing the UFMP goals. This brainstorming would be more than information sharing, it's about creating relationships. Relationship building is what's going to strengthen the relationships and create synergies.

MM – Sandra and I will work on a new draft

GB – Opportunity to make it explicit that this is a collective effort to implement UFMP.

Public comment

SZ – reiterate to thinking outside of the box. Taking the initiative and draft an ordinance. What's missing, components and provisions. Momentum depends on who puts the idea forth first. This would give the UFC a stronger position.

Question on the 30% UFMP goal. Heard the presentation done last week. How defensible is the 30% number. What are the assumptions used to arrive at the goal of 30%. If assumptions are presented they can be evaluated. Did they include planting trees in the I-5 corridor working with the State? Did they consider planting in schools?

The issue of trees is very political. What's a livable city. How many trees do you want? Does the public want more or less trees?

He mentioned he was disappointed on a comment made by Commissioner Staeheli regarding telling people that we don't have a canopy goal.

Commissioner Staeheli responded that what SZ said is not what she either said or meant. She told SZ that she cares about this and that we are a city of enforcement and we can't pretend that we are going to make people do something that has not ordinance behind it. (for details hear digital recording).

MO – Ordinance will not mean anything. The only important thing is buy-in. Have public meetings and start the public process. April 29 is Arbor Day – put a public face to the effort.

UFC doesn't have a dynamic leader or vision. He started asking about tree inventory back in 1985. Where are the trees and what's happening to them. Pruning, removal, and planting. Go to parks. Get the details on where the trees are. Ask SDOT where the trees are that they worked on.

Next month's agenda items

We'll include in next week's agenda review of language for recommendation to DPD on % canopy cover goal in the Comp Plan. Approval of letter to IDT. Review of recommendation on shoreline master plan, and ideas for Arbor Day.

PS – add our mission on the agenda so it's clear

Adjourn

Public Input:

From: Michael Oxman [mailto:michaeloxman@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 08, 2011 11:44 AM
To: Harper, Ruth
Cc: Dewald, Shane; PintodeBader, Sandra; Rasmussen, Tom; SeattlePOSA@yahoogroups.com
Subject: Comments to Freight Advisory Board

Dear Commissioners,

Thanks for the opportunity to address the Seattle Freight Advisory Board. I am a member of a tree advocacy group called SOUFI (Save Our Urban Forest Infrastructure). I am concerned about the sparse urban forest in SODO and other industrial zones. I feel the need to navigate trucks should no longer exclude the presence of a significant tree population.

I hope the Seattle Freight Advisory Board can place an item on the March 15, 2011 agenda to discuss how to achieve an increase in sustainable urban forest canopy cover over industrial districts, while maintaining freight mobility. The 2 primary ways to increase canopy are planting new areas, & maintaining existing trees, shrubs and groundcovers.

<http://www.seattle.gov/sfab/default.htm>

The Seattle Comprehensive Plan states environmental goal D2 of improving quality of life, air quality and land values with a sustainable green canopy occupying 40% of the city's land base.

http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Comprehensive_Plan_Annual_Amendments/Proposed2007Amendments/default.asp

The 2007 Urban Forest Management Plan states that 'Freight Movers' should be consulted prior to developing a picture of where these new trees can be located and maintained to achieve canopy cover of 10% of the land in this management unit. A tree planting goal of 640,000 trees over 30 years was established by this plan. See Chapter 4.7; Table 14; Page 84.

http://www.seattle.gov/environment/documents/Final_UFMP.pdf

A more recent survey of satellite images shows the current amount of planted permeable surface area is only 4.3% of industrial zones.

http://www.seattle.gov/trees/docs/Tree_Canopy_Assessment_Council_EEMU.pdf

The Seattle Urban Forestry Commission has recognized this need for adding more than double the amount of landscaping in SODO and other industrial zones. The Urban Forestry Commission has stated that new planting areas available in the industrial districts should be a priority that needs design work, stakeholder awareness, and financial planning to commence before new construction takes place.

http://www.seattle.gov/trees/docs/Commission_minutes/2011%20Minutes/030211%20DRAFT%20meeting%20summary.pdf

The land ownership where these changes will occur is on both private property and SDOT right of ways. This will involve a partnership between interested parties. I suggest that the Freight Advisory Board schedule talks with the Urban Forestry Commission to align the positions on how this zone can be transformed from bleak grey concrete to lush green landscape.

<http://www.seattle.gov/trees/UFcommission.htm>

The Seattle ReLeaf program details current efforts to refine Geographic Information System (GIS) databases, planting programs, and public awareness efforts to achieve measurable improvement in sustainability of our green infrastructure.

<http://www.seattle.gov/trees/>

Our group would be happy to provide more information on the process of how these plans were developed. I appreciate your voluntary service to the community.

Arboreally yours,

Michael Oxman
2317 Harbor Ave SW
Seattle, WA 98126
(206) 949-8733
michaeloxman@comcast.net
www.SaveSeattlesTrees.com